

Not to Scale

Figure 1: Physiographic Map of Western North Carolina

SITE CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Site Description

The South Mountains Range, carved out of the Blue Ridge by erosion, covers approximately 100,000 acres in the Piedmont Province of North Carolina. This range is easily identified on the physiographic map shown in Figure 1. The range is characterized by prominent ridges, knobs, and valleys with steep side slopes. It is situated at the convergence of Burke, Cleveland, and Rutherford counties.

South Mountains State Park encompasses almost 18,000 acres of the South Mountains Range and is located along the southwestern boundary of Burke County. Its context within the state and its region are indicated in Figures 2 and 3. The park borders Rutherford and Cleveland counties to its south. Morganton, the county seat of Burke County, is located approximately 18 miles north of the Jacob Fork section of the park.

South Mountains State Park contains a portion of one of the largest remaining continuously-forested areas in the North Carolina Piedmont. It is also known for its many miles of Outstanding Resource Water streams and Trout Waters. Drainage of the park occurs through three primary watersheds. These watersheds are named Jacob Fork, Henry Fork, and Clear Creek. The watershed names are used within this document to define very distinct sections of the park.

Though a significant portion of the park was logged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*Idol, 1999*), it contains a number of examples of ecological communities that are typically found in the Blue Ridge and are rather uncommon in the Piedmont. The predominant natural vegetation in the park is deciduous hardwoods including oak, hickory, and formerly chestnut, mixed with pine, with an understory of rhododendron, laurel, and holly.

Cultural Resources

Past development within the park has been minimal. Much of its history revolves around the several reservoirs that are still in ex-



Fall foliage at South Mountains State Park



View from Chestnut Knob

istence today, though no longer functioning as water supply reservoirs. These reservoirs are now known as the Clear Creek Reservoir, the Henry Fork Reservoir, and the Bailey Fork Reservoir.

Past development in the park, other than the reservoirs, has included several old homesteads, cemeteries, and schools. The Office of State Archaeology lists several sites that have been identified within the park boundaries. These include six family cemetery sites and seven other historic sites, including four homesites, identified based on the presence of remains of structures and various

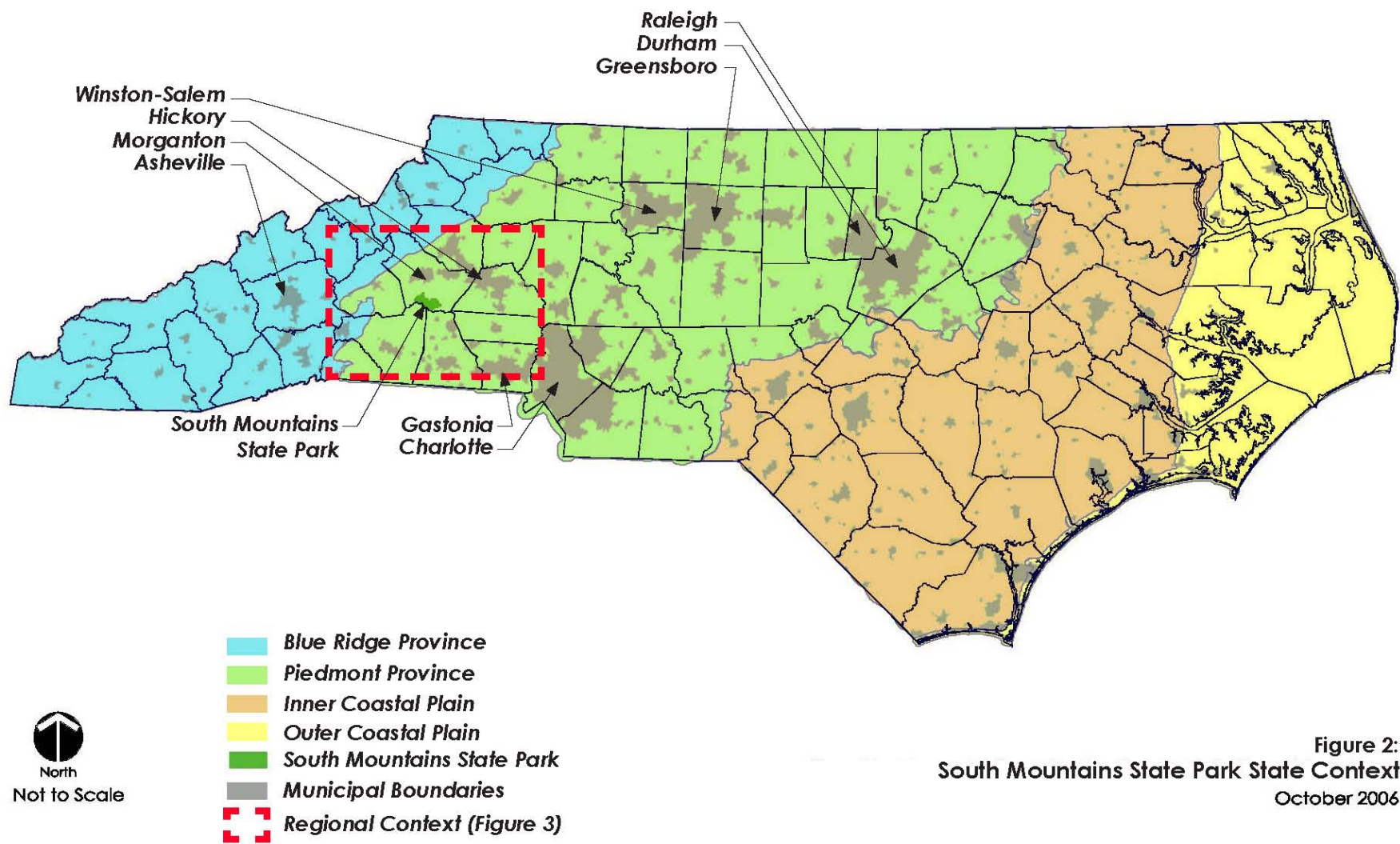


Figure 2:
South Mountains State Park State Context
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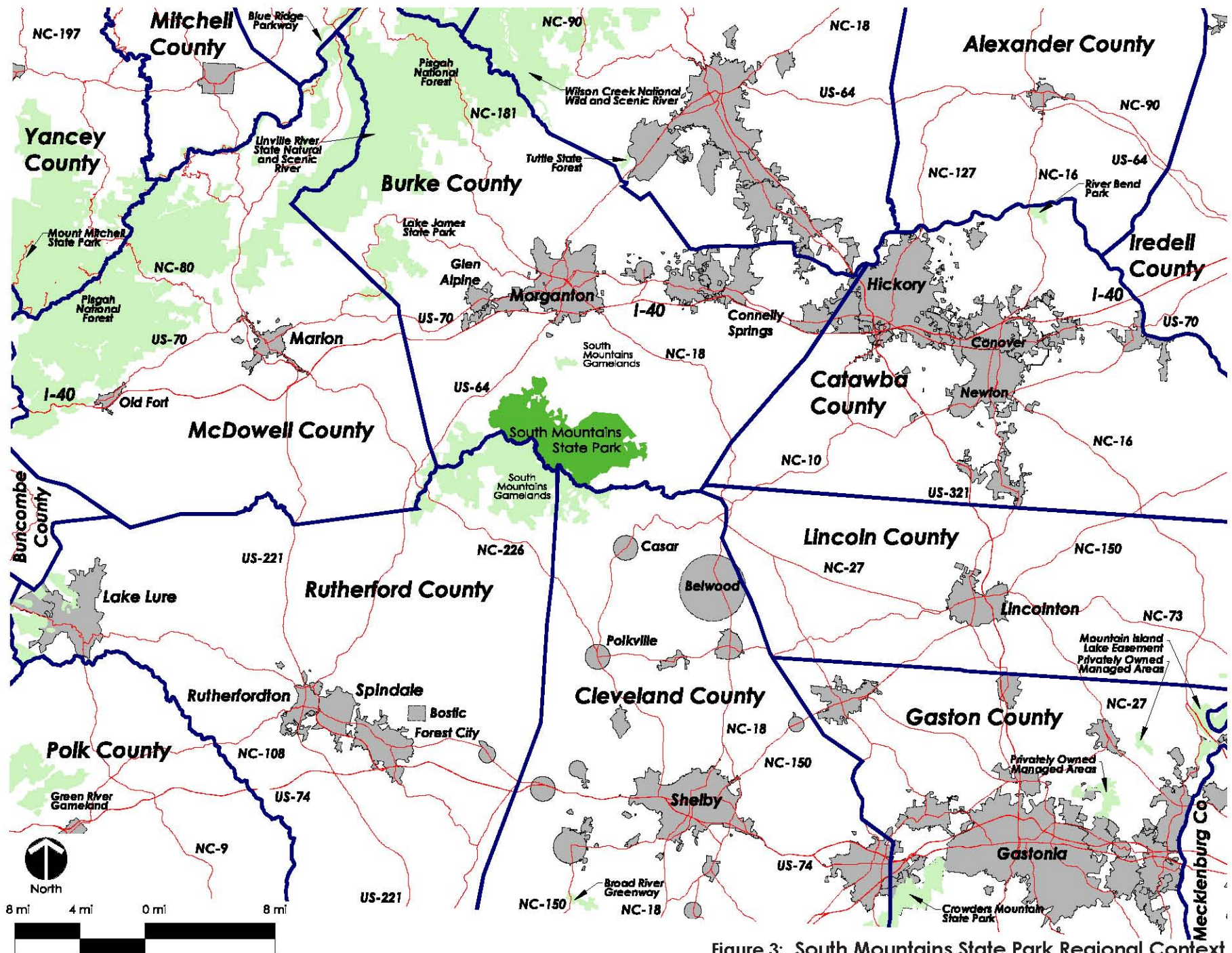


Figure 3: South Mountains State Park Regional Context

other artifacts, a home or school site, a wooden bridge, and a stone wall. In 1999, an archaeological study was performed for the NC Division of Parks and Recreation on these 13 sites by TRC Garrow Associates, Inc. All of these 13 sites are located within the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork sections of the park. Documentary and archaeological evidence indicates that all of these sites were abandoned in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. No National Register of Historic Places recommendations were made for any of the sites. This master plan does not propose development in any of these locations; however, if any development is proposed in these areas in the future, further investigation may be warranted. Although cemeteries typically are not eligible for National Register of Historic Places status, all cemeteries are protected under North Carolina law, and no ground disturbing activity will occur in these sites (*Idol, 1999*).

In historic aerials from 1954 and 1967 (*NC State Archives, 1954 and 1967*), the park area in the vicinity of the Clear Creek Reservoir appeared to be heavily forested except for an area to the northwest of the reservoir dam, which appeared to be an open field, and an area of land near what is now known as Pealot Drive. This area appeared to be used for agricultural crops during that time period. Park staff refers to this area of the park as the Pealot, and confirms

that Broughton Hospital used a portion of this area for agricultural purposes in the past. Distinct agricultural activity was also apparent to the northwest of the park in 1954 and 1967. There is an old log cabin, formerly used by the School for the Deaf, in the vicinity of the Bailey Fork Reservoir.

The large old willow oaks in the vicinity of the Clear Creek Reservoir dam were planted in the early 1950s by Mr. Henry Lyles, then lead maintenance supervisor for the reservoir, in charge of carpentry, shop and grounds. Park staff suspects the trees were planted mostly for aesthetics, and possibly to help dry up the area below the dam since willow oaks take up a lot of water.

A pre-1979 history description of the Jacob Fork section of the park has been excerpted from the 1979 Master Plan for South Mountains State Park and is provided in Appendix D.

More recent development in the park has been limited to the construction of park-related roads, trails, structures, and most recently a visitor center for the park in the Jacob Fork section. Most of the trails within the park have been located on historic logging or fire roads, as well as along roads developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s.



Remains of a homestead chimney near Jacob Branch campsites.



School photo from one of several schools that were located within the park boundary. (School and year unknown)

Land Acquisition History

The South Mountains area was first recommended as a state park by a National Park Service study in 1940. A state park was established in 1974. At that time, the park consisted primarily of the Jacob Fork section. Conservation of the outstanding rivers, stream, and water quality of this watershed was one of the primary considerations for establishing the park and remains one of the primary interpretive themes of the park today.

The Henry Fork section of the park, a pristine watershed, was added to the property in several pieces, primarily between 1996 and 1999. This portion of the park contains the Henry Fork Reservoir, formerly the drinking water supply for the city of Morganton. During its days as a water supply watershed, this section of the park was patrolled by city staff to maintain its security as a drinking water source.



Existing Willow Oaks near Clear Creek Reservoir

In 2000, 2,532 acres of the Clear Creek section of the park, locally known as the Broughton Watershed, and formerly the drinking water supply for Broughton Hospital, was transferred to the park from the NC Department of Agriculture. In 2003, the NC Department of Health and Human Services agreed to transfer 450 acres known as the School for the Deaf (Bailey Fork) Watershed to the park. This property is located in the northernmost portion of the park. Through the transfer of this latter tract of land, the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources and NC Department of Health and Human Services entered into a joint agreement to create an environmental education center in the Clear Creek section of the park, intended to serve all citizens as well as including state-of-the-art accessibility features for special needs populations.



Chimney remains in Henry Fork section